

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3172
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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NY
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E. O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PEPR PINT IS US
SUBJ: ISRAELI POST MORTEM OF SENATE AIRCRAFT VOTE

REFS: (A) TEL AVIV 6237, (B) TEL AVIV 6337

1. SUMMARY: IN THE KNESSET TODAY PRIME MINISTER BEGIN
DECLARED THAT THE SENATE VOTE REPRESENTED A SEVERE BLOW
TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY AND ANNOUNCED THAT SUNDAY'S CABINET
SESSION WOULD BE DEVOTED TO DISCUSSING THE MATTER, AT WHICH
TIME "NECESSARY STEPS" WOULD BE DECIDED UPON. IN A CONTINUING
POST MORTEM, ISRAELIS ARE FEARFUL THAT THE SPECIAL US/ISRAELI
RELATIONSHIP MAY BE SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED. WHILE BOTH
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GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION MK'S ARE ALARMED BY WHAT THEY SEE
AS A NEW AMERICAN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST WHICH REDUCES
ISRAEL'S STATUS, THE LABOUR PARTY CONTINUES TO BE SHARPLY
CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DETERIORA-
TION OF US-ISRAELI RELATIONS WHICH HAD LED TO THE SENATE'S
ACQUIESCENCE IN THAT POLICY. DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN, IN
CONTRAST, CONTINUES TO COUNSEL PUTTING THE SENATE VOTE IN

THE PAST AND RECOGNIZING THE DETERMINANT FACTOR OF BROAD AMERICAN POLICY CONSIDERATIONS. END SUMMARY

2. PRIME MINISTER BEGIN, ADDRESSING THE KNESSET ON THE SUBJECT OF THE AIRCRAFT PACKAGE DEAL, REPEATED HIS CONCERN THAT THE VOTE REPRESENTED A "SEVERE" BLOW TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY. THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION, BY TAKING THE UNPRECEDENTED STEP OF LINKING ISRAELI AND ARAB WEAPON PROCUREMENT, HAD BROKEN AN UNCONDITIONAL AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL. BEGIN, ANSWERING LABOUR PARTY CRITICS, ASSERTED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT THE CONFRONTATION STATES HAD RECEIVED AMERICAN AIRCRAFT. THIS PROVOKED AN INTERJECTION BY MK BAR-LEV (ALIGNMENT) TO THE EFFECT THAT THIS WAS, IN FACT, THE FIRST INSTANCE OF ADVANCED U.S. WEAPONRY BEING SUPPLIED TO ISRAEL'S ENEMIES. BEGIN DECLINED TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT FURTHER PRIOR TO SUNDAY'S CABINET SESSION, AND THE MATTER WAS REFERRED TO THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE.

3. HOWEVER, IN A COMMUNICATION BY BEGIN'S PERSONAL AIDE, KADISHAI, (REFTEL B) TO THE AMBASSADOR, THE PRIME MINISTER EVIDENTLY SOUGHT TO SIGNAL THAT HE DID NOT WANT THIS DEBATE TO DEGENERATE INTO AN ANTI-US CAMPAIGN.

4. IN ALARMED TONES, ACCOMPANIED BY EXPRESSIONS OF ANGER AND DESPONDENCY, ISRAELIS CONTINUE TO ANALYZE AND DISSECT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE PORTENTS OF THE SENATE VOTE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THEIR SECURITY. A CONSISTENT REFRAIN IS HEARD THAT THE SPECIAL US/ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP, PERHAPS BEST SYMBOLIZED IN THE SENATE BY THE 1975 LETTER OF SUPPORT SIGNED BY 76 OF ITS MEMBERS, HAS NOW BEEN DEALT A HEAVY BLOW. IF THE SENATE VOTE WERE SIMPLY A RESULT OF TACTICAL MISHANDLING BY THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT AND LOBBY, THERE WOULD BE LESS CAUSE FOR ALARM. THE CONGRESSIONAL ACTION IS SEEN BY MOST ISRAELIS AS REFLECTING A NEW AMERICAN POLICY WHICH COULD REDUCE ISRAEL'S SPECIAL STATUS AND MAKE IT MERELY ONE OF SEVERAL FRIENDLY MIDDLE EAST STATES. THE SENATE, LONG A BASTION OF US PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL, HAS NOW FOLLOWED THE ADMINISTRATION AND U S PUBLIC OPINION IN ALLOWING CONSIDERATIONS OF OIL AND REALPOLITIK TO WATER DOWN A HISTORIC COMMITMENT.

5. WHILE LIKUD MEMBERS FOCUS THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT AND BITTERNESS ON THE U S ADMINISTRATION, THE LABOUR OPPOSITION HAS MOUNTED A CAMPAIGN CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE VITAL U S RELATIONSHIP, FOCUSING IN PARTICULAR ON THE AIRCRAFT PACKAGE. ALTHOUGH RABIN, FOR TACTICAL REASONS, BLOCKED A MOVE TO CALL A "NO CONFIDENCE" MOTION TODAY, THE LABOUR PARTY CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE

TO DEVELOP THE THEME OF ATTACKING THE GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING
SQUANDERED ONE OF ISRAEL'S MOST VALUABLE RESOURCES, THE
STRONG FRIENDSHIP WHICH LABOUR HAD BUILT WITH THE US GOVT.

6. MARGALIT OF HAARETZ TOLD US TODAY OF A QUITE NOTICEABLE
UNDERTONE OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IN THE KNESSET. THERE IS
SPECULATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT IN A FIT OF PETULENCE MAY
NOW PERMIT SUCH FEELINGS TO DISRUPT CONTINUATIONS OF THE
PEACE MOVES. BEGIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE SUNDAY CABINET
MEETING WILL BE DEVOTED TO DISCUSSING THE AIRCRAFT PACKAGE
AND THE "NECESSARY NEXT STEPS," HAS LED TO
SPECULATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT EITHER MAKE ANOTHER
DECLARATION OF ITS DISSATISFACTION OR ELSE
REQUEST FURTHER SECURITY GUARANTEES FROM THE ADMINISTRATION.
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7. AN EXCEPTION TO THE UNRELIEVED PESSIMISM WHICH HAS
EMANATED FROM OFFICIAL CIRCLES OVER THE LAST TWO DAYS IS
DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN'S LINE THAT "IT COULD HAVE BEEN
WORSE," AND THAT IT IS TIME TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE
REALITY OF AMERICAN-SUPPLIED WEAPONRY IN THE MILITARY
ESTABLISHMENTS OF MODERATE ARAB STATES. LEWIS

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